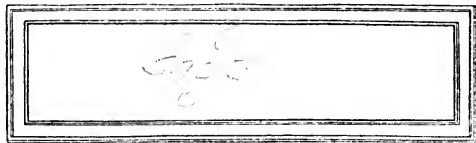
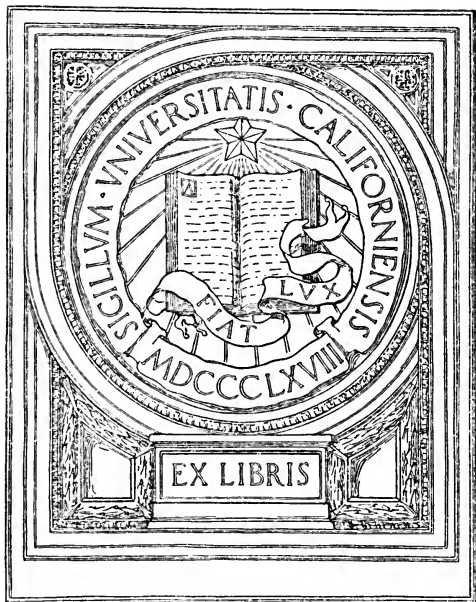


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Camping out.

Frontispiece "Orphan Brothers."

Handwritten: The Orphan Brothers

THE
ORPHAN BROTHERS.

A Story of California.

BY
MRS. M. D. STRONG.

*Written for the Congregational Sabbath-School and Publishing Society,
and approved by the Committee of Publication.*

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THE ORPHAN BROTHERS.



CHAPTER I.

LEFT ALONE.

NOT very long ago, one bright May morning, a gray-haired physician rang the bell of a house on Second Street. That same physician is in San Francisco now: his hair has not many more silver threads, and I think his fine face wears, if possible, a more benignant and kindly look; but I can not tell you his name, because I don't think he would like to see it in print.

A middle-aged woman, a comfortable, good-natured looking person, answered his summons.

“Why, good-morning, Mrs. Betts; how dost thou do? I half expected to find thee on thy bed.”

“Oh, no,” said the woman; “*I* didn’t send for you on my own account this time; it’s for a man that came here from the steamer the other day. You see,” she continued, shutting the hall door and lowering her voice to a confidential tone: “husband’s in a terrible way about having the Panama fever in the house, and he wants the poor man taken right off to the hospital; but there’s two little boys, and their mother is dead, they tell me, and he sha’n’t be took away to no hospital if I can help it. Come.” And she led the way up stairs, her

stream of talk running on all the same as she mounted them. "I don't know who sent them here: somebody on the steamer who knew about my house, I reckon; but he told me, the night he came, he just wanted a quiet place to rest in for a few days, and then he was going into the country."

"When was he taken sick?" asked the doctor, who seemed to have been watching his opportunity to slip in a word.

"Well, you see, he was kind o' complaining like when he came, and he ain't never been down stairs to eat a mouthful; and here yesterday, one of the little boys came crying to me, and said his father was dreadful sick, and he didn't know what ailed him; so I went up to see him, but I reckon he was out of his head. I did what

I could, and he seemed easier for a while ; but, this morning, he's as bad as ever again. This is the room. Here, sonny, I've brought the doctor ; and you see what's to be done, doctor, and I'll be around again in a minute." And the kind-hearted dame took herself away.

Two little boys, differing very little in size, and evidently not much in age, shared the room with the sick man, one occupying a stool by the bedside, the other leaning on the pillow and watching the fever-flushed face of his father, who turned uneasily, and moaned and muttered in his half-delirium. It was to this little watcher that the doctor addressed himself, after he had carefully examined his patient.

"How long has he been like this ?"

The child's lip trembled. "He's been

some sick ever since we came on shore, but he got to be so dreadful bad yesterday morning. You see we're all alone — father and Charlie and I ; and I don't know what to do : ” and then his words failed, and he hid his face in the pillow, sobbing bitterly.

“ Oh ! thou must not cry so,” said the doctor tenderly ; “ we will see what we can do.”

Either the strange, kind voice in the room, or his child's sobs seemed to rouse the man ; he raised himself a little in the bed, and looked at the doctor with something like consciousness.

“ What is the matter ? ” he asked slowly.

“ Thou hast been sick : thou hadst better keep quiet. I called to see what I could do for thee.”

He leaned back on the pillow, looking

from one to the other of his children, and then again at the doctor. Finally he asked suddenly, —

“Doctor, do you think I am in any danger?”

The physician did not answer at once; and then he said, as if it were difficult to speak at all, “Thou hast asked a hard question; but I will tell thee the truth. Thou art a very sick man; but I have seen men as sick who yet lived. We will do all we can; but we can never tell what the will of our heavenly Father may be: and if thou hast any arrangements to make, any last words to say, why, thou hadst better be prepared for the worst.”

The flush of the fever faded out of the sick man's cheek, leaving it blanched and white, as if all the burning blood in his

veins had settled back on his heart ; he put out both his trembling arms, and drew his boys down close upon his breast.

“ Mary’s children, and they’re all I’ve got left ! ” he gasped, with a pitiful appealing glance at the doctor’s face.

It was more than the humane physician could bear. He heard Mrs. Betts’s bustling step in the hall. “ I will see thee again to-day,” he said hastily, and passed out.

Only once after that did the stranger ever seem to realize his condition, or give utterance to any thing sufficiently coherent or connected to be understood by those about him, although, through all his deliriums, his eyes rested on his boys with exceeding tenderness. Mrs. Betts had been in, and he had handed her his purse, making at the same time an effort to leave

some directions with her ; but his mind wandered again before any more than a few disjointed sentences had left his lips. Once, however, when she had gone out, and they were left alone for a few precious brief moments, the fever-mists cleared away from his brain, and the hand of approaching death, whose terrible touch had palsied all his functions, lifted for a little ; and he said to the child-nurse that seldom left his side, —

“Put your hand under the pillows, Frank, and raise me a little ;” and when it was done, he added in a whisper, “O Frank ! it is a bitter trial ; you do not know how bitter. I never thought to have been called to pass through such a one ; but ‘He doeth all things well.’ ”

His children pressed closer to his bed-

side, resting their cheeks on his pillow beside him, and hushing their sobs into silence under the shadow of the great sorrow, which, they felt, though they were too young to fully comprehend its depth, was approaching nearer and nearer.

“Don’t grieve, Frank; you must be a brave boy now, for father’s sake. You’ll find my pocket Testament under the pillow; take it for your own, Frank, when I am gone. Now read to me the verses that are marked, where the leaves are turned down.”

And quieted and calmed by the solemn, earnest tone, the child read: “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take, therefore, no thought for the morrow, for the morrow

shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

"That's all your father has to leave you ; but it's better than silver, or gold, or houses, or lands. You'll feel that, and know it, when you come where I am now. ' Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you : ' read that every day, my children, and do as it bids you, and it will keep your feet in the right path ; and away at the end of your journey you will find ' the house with many mansions.' Mamma went there, when she had been with us only a little while, and when we loved her the best ; and now I am going to her."

He seemed exhausted by the effort, and lay back on the pillow, closing his eyes for

a little while. Frank wondered, with a terrible chill and tremor of heart, if that strange look on his face could be the shadow of death.

But presently he looked up again and said earnestly, "Take care of Charlie, Frank, and love him always : he'll have no one but you. Poor Charlie can't do as you can ; and your mother was always so tender of him."

"I will, father," said Frank, with great effort to be calm ; "I'll take care of him, if I live ; I'll always think of him before myself."



CHAPTER II.

THE RESOLUTION.

NOW, Jeremiah, I'm as savin' and as close as you are, any day, and I work a great deal harder; but I sha'n't touch a dime of that money, and I ain't a going to let you, if I can help it; and I know I can. There'll be scant twenty dollars left after paying funeral expenses; and that's going to be saved for those boys."

"What's in their trunk?"

"Nothing but their clothes and some old bedding that I don't want,—a pair of coarse gray blankets, and such: the man's clothes ain't of much account, and the boys ain't

got any thing but what they'll need. Then there's a gun ; I reckon 'tain't worth much, but the boy seems to think a deal of it, because it was his father's. I tell you, Jeremiah, it ain't much they've had out of us, and we'll never be the poorer for doing a little for folks that need it. You know what the Saviour said about 'doing unto others as we would have them do unto us;' and the Bible says, 'God loves a cheerful giver.' There's the doctor, he never charged a cent, and he was here off and on half a dozen times. I don't believe God will forget him, nor us either, for doing by these poor children as we would wish people to do by ours, if we should die here and leave them all alone in the world, as so many people do in California."

Mr. Jeremiah Betts swallowed hard once

or twice, and then said, in a half regretful tone, "Them doctors can afford it: they make it up again when they git a chance at a rich one. But what's to be done with the boys? You ain't thinking of keeping them here, are you? 'Twould be just like one of your plans: as if we hadn't got young ones enough of our own to slave ourselves for!"

"I ain't going to turn them right out, Jeremiah, and you don't want to have me. Come, now, you don't mean half as bad as you talk; you always do about right in the end. I am going to look out for the boys, and do what I can, and the doctor's going to look around too. Their father said something, before he died, about their having an uncle somewhere in Contra Costa County; but he was so flighty, there wasn't

much satisfaction to be had out of him. The oldest one might be got into some kind of a place, I should think: he's a right sensible, smart chap. Anyhow, if worse comes to worse, there is the Orphan Asylum. I'm going to have a good talk with them both by and by."

And so, having talked Mr. Jeremiah Betts out of countenance, and fairly talked him out of the house too, the good woman proceeded to hold a consultation with the little orphans.

"Well, now, what's to become of you two?" said she, sitting down on the trunk in their room, and coming to the point at once, while the two lonesome-looking little fellows drew close to each other.

"Father told us to try to find Uncle Frank," spoke up the elder.

“ But do you know where he lives ? and did he know you were coming to California ? ”

“ No, ma’am,” said the child, shaking his head doubtfully : “ I don’t think he’s written to father this great while, not since mother died. But I guess we could find it : here’s where he used to live, — father wrote it down for me on this paper, that morning he was a little better. And he told me to find him.”

“ Queer plan, I should think,” said Mrs. Betts dubiously : “ there’s no telling where he’d be by this time, folks change about so in California. Haven’t you got anybody at home, that might be written to, — no grandfather, no uncle, no relation ? ”

“ No, ma’am : grandfather died last winter, and he had nobody but father ;

and Uncle Frank, here in California, was mother's brother, and there was only two of them. And I guess that's all the relations that ever we had. I know we never had any cousins, Charlie and me. There's the neighbors around the old place; but it's no use writing to them. If I can't find my uncle, I am going to get a place to work. I am twelve years old, and I can earn plenty of money, and buy Charlie every thing he wants."

"Poor child! it's very little you know about the world yet; but it's right to keep up good courage. And if your father told you to find your uncle, why, maybe it's best to do as he said. But if you can't find him, I think we could get somebody to take you; and as for your brother" —

"You don't mean, ma'am, to take me

away from Charlie?" interrupted the boy, taking fast hold of his brother's hand: "I could not do that; I must take care of Charlie. That was the last word father said; and mother said so too, when she died. Whatever becomes of us, Charlie and I go together." And the child shut his lips firmly, and held his brother close, though the tears dropped silently.

"Bless your hearts, it would be a burning shame to separate you; but I'm afraid it'll be a hard matter to find any place where they'll take you both. But you needn't fret about it now; we'll see. Be good boys, and trust in your heavenly Father, and he will take care of you. He has said, 'In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he will direct thy steps;' and he won't forsake those who are left as you are,

if they do right. And about finding your uncle, I don't see how you can go away over there alone. I'm afraid it will cost considerable, too, things do cost so in California. There's a stage that goes to Martinez, and I'll find out what the fare is. Now, here's twenty dollars left of the money your father gave the doctor; and all expenses are paid, — every thing, — so this belongs to you. And you see that you take good care of it; for, though it ain't much, it's all you've got in the world. If you'd been like most boys, I wouldn't have trusted you with it. You'd better leave your trunk here: you wouldn't want to take it away over there on uncertainties. I'll take good care of it. And it seems to me, you'd better leave your brother, too: he's welcome to stay."

“ Thank you, ma’am, you’re very kind ; but I couldn’t : there’s only Charlie and me now.”

“ Oh, well, child, if you feel so, maybe it’s best for you to go together.” And Mrs. Betts arose from her seat and wiped her eyes with the corner of her apron, and said, “ I’m sure I haven’t the heart to cross you, poor things ; and I’ll go right away and find out how you’ll have to go, and what it will cost, and all about it.” And, too active to waste time in tears, she hurried down stairs.

“ O Frank ! do you think they’ll take you away from me ? ” asked pale little Charlie, as soon as the sound of her footsteps had died away.

“ I should like to see them do it,” said Frank, drying his eyes and straightening

up: "don't you be a bit troubled; I am going to take care of you: didn't I promise father and mother both? And I'll be so good to you, Charlie; I'll never speak another cross word to you, never, so long as I live."

* "But what if we can't find Uncle Frank, what will become of us? O father, father! I wish you had taken us with you!"

"Now, Charlie, don't cry so — don't." And the elder brother soothed him as tenderly as his mother could have done. "Look up and listen, because I've got something to tell you. I've planned what we will do. I thought about it all last night."

CHAPTER III.

THE PLAN.

Poor little Charlie! the great world appeared very lonely and dreary to him just then: his grief would have its way before he could at all comprehend the plan his brother was explaining; and even then he did not seem as much cheered as Frank had hoped and expected.

“Don’t you know, that was what father meant to do? Don’t you remember how often we talked about it on the steamer? Now let us do just what he would have done if he had lived.”

“But, Frank, we shouldn’t know the way alone; and to walk clear to Alamo,

where Uncle Frank lives, would be a long way, I guess."

"Not so very far, Charlie, only twenty miles from Oakland; for that gentleman who sits on the other side of the table told me so. And we can't lose the way, for there are houses all along, and I can inquire."

Charlie looked down, dubiously tracing out zigzag lines on the carpet with the top of his boot, while he thought. Evidently he did not consider his brother's plan very inspiring. Frank went on:—

"The blankets are in the bottom of the trunk, and I can roll them up and strap them on my back,—I know how; and father's game-bag is there too,—that will hold a big lot of crackers that I am going to buy here in the city, before we start, and

the powder and the shot ; for, of course, we will take the gun. How glad I am that we have got it ! ”

“ I could carry the gun,” broke in Charlie, brightening up, and looking a little pleasant, for the first time since his father’s death.

“ To be sure you could ; and you shall carry it, just whenever you like ; and when you get tired, I’ll take it.”

“ But then I shall be afraid to sleep in the woods, now we haven’t father to take care of us,” said Charlie, his face clouding again.

“ O Charlie ! there isn’t any woods between here and Alamo ; there are trees and bushes, but no woods, such as we have at home.”

“ How do you know ? ”

“ That gentleman told me so. He says he’s been to Alamo, and Martinez too, many a time. And he says there is plenty of game, — birds and rabbits everywhere ; and you know I got to be a first-rate shot last year, when father and I went up to the Adirondack country ; ” and Frank went to the corner where the gun stood, drew off its case, and examined it with the air of one who fully appreciated all its good points. “ If you’d only been with us then, Charlie, you would know how it’s done, and you would say it was just the best and pleasantest way in the world to travel. When night comes, we’ve only to look out a sheltered place, build a fire, cook our supper, spread some bushes down, and cover up with our blankets and go to sleep. There will be no stage-fare and no bills to

pay. And I want to keep this twenty dollars, for if— well, it would buy shoes and clothes for you and me for as much as two years, at any rate.”

Frank did not like to say, “If we should not find our uncle,” though in his secret heart he had some misgivings about it, and felt that the sooner he began to depend on himself and learn to husband their slender means, the better it would be.

Good Mrs. Betts’s astonishment was overwhelming, when, after having made all possible inquiries and arrangements, and having determined to go to Oakland with the boys herself, and put them in the care of the stage driver, she called Frank into the kitchen to tell him the result of her endeavors, while she went on with her pie-making, and there heard, for the first time,

his intention of accomplishing the journey on foot, with gun and blankets, camping out at night. She took her hands out of the dough, and stood with open mouth, unconsciously flourishing the rolling-pin in the air.

“Did you ever in all your born days!” she exclaimed, when, at length she found breath. “Gracious goodness! the boy is crazy. Two children of your age going off on such a tramp, with a gun, and nobody to take care of you, and sleeping out o’ doors at night! Why, the bears and the catamounts will eat you up, and maybe the rattlesnakes too; and you’d catch your death o’ cold, and shoot yourselves besides.”

“A gentleman here in the house, who used to live over there, told me there

wasn't any bears in all Contra Costa County. And I have slept on the ground with my father a great many nights, and didn't take cold. I can shoot very well, too, and father said I was just as careful with a gun as he was."

"But it ain't safe, no way, for a boy of your size to handle a gun. I ain't a-going to hear a word to this now: why, it would be just like the 'Babes in the Woods,' that I used to read about in a book, when I was a little girl. There, I'll wash my hands, and you put on your cap and come right over to the doctor's office; he'll be in at this time of day, and we'll see if we can't talk you out of this."

The doctor listened attentively to Mrs. Betts's representations of the case, Frank meanwhile standing by with a very sober

face, and slipping in a deprecating word or clause or explanation, whenever she paused a moment to take breath. He had not anticipated such determined opposition at all, and he began to feel a little uneasy, and to doubt somewhat the practicability of his plan, now that he saw it in the light of another person's judgment.

“Well, friend,” said the doctor, when Mrs. Betts had had her say, and stopped to rest. “I do not see any thing so very dreadful about it. Thou art very kind to interest thyself so, and the children should not do this without thy consent; but suppose we let them have their own way this time, and see what will come of it. This one has a pretty old head on his shoulders,” and the doctor laid his hand on Frank's brown curls: “I think he knows what he

is about. They might be two or three days going, so as not to fatigue themselves; and if they do not find their uncle, or get any tidings of him, they can return in the same way. They'll need their money, and I am glad to see them want to save it."

There was no appeal, in Mrs. Betts's opinion, from the doctor's judgment. A half-hour longer in his office, and a patient answering of the further objections she urged, so completely changed her mind that she was as much in earnest to help on Frank's undertaking, as she had been to prevent it.

"After a week or two," remarked the doctor, when she rose to go, "there'll be a place in a store, that I think I can get for this boy, where he'd have his board at least, the first year; and the other—let


me see, — he's large for his age ; but he's only nine years old, he tells me : if they shouldn't find their friends, maybe we'll see about getting him into the orphan asylum."

Frank opened both his eyes and ears, and lost not a syllable of this speech, but he said nothing.



CHAPTER IV.

THE EXPEDITION.

RS. BETTS stood in the door, the next morning, giving last directions, and seeing the boys off. There had been no occasion for Frank's proposed purchase of crackers, for she had filled his game-bag so full of sandwiches and cakes, that there was scarcely room for his ammunition; besides putting a satchel over Charlie's shoulder, filled to its utmost capacity with such good things as would bear packing and shaking.

“Now, boys, the Oakland boat goes at just nine o'clock; but you'll have time enough to get there and walk slow, if you

don't stop anywhere. You are sure you know the way to the wharf?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am! I went there twice yesterday."

"Well, now, if you find your uncle, of course he'll be coming, or sending for the trunk; but you mustn't wait for that: you must write, right away, for I sha'n't sleep o' nights, till I know what's become of you. And if you don't find him, come right back here. Be good boys," she added, as she shook hands with them both; "be good to each other,—remember that you have a Father in heaven who will care for you every day, if you love him and trust him; and do, do be careful with that gun."

Frank's lip trembled a little, and tears started in his eyes. His heart was brim-

ming over with grateful feelings; but, somehow, he didn't know exactly what words to put them in. He felt, too, that what she said about a Father in heaven was true, and just what he and Charlie needed to realize in their own hearts, to give them strength and courage to keep them from evil as they went out friendless and alone, and almost penniless, into the great world; but her words made him think of the dying words of his mother, when, on that sad, sad night, never to be forgotten, he sat on the bed by her side, with his little hand clasped lovingly in hers, and looked on her sweet face, so strangely pale, and heard her last motherly counsel to him, faintly whispered in almost exactly the same terms; and his voice refused to obey his will.

"I am very much obliged to you, ma'am," he began, and then something choked him so he couldn't say another word. He tried again, once or twice, and at last with a rather abrupt "good-by," he went down the steps.

But Mrs. Betts was not at all sentimental, and she was too much occupied with her care and anxiety on their account, to have a thought as to whether they were appreciative and grateful, or not.

"I do not know," she soliloquized, shutting her door, after they had turned the corner, "it seems such a wild-goose chase. I don't know whether I have been in the way of my duty, to let them go. Poor things! they've a hard life before them; but God watches over the fatherless and the motherless, and I believe will take care

of them, though they are so young and helpless, and alone in the world."

"Isn't she kind?" exclaimed Charlie, as soon as they were out of hearing. "If we have to go back, why can't we live with her?"

Poor boy! deprived of the mother-love that had been left out of his childhood, his heart yearned toward every thing that was motherly in other women.

"O Charlie! she's got children of her own, you know. She's good and kind, but I don't think she'd want us always; and her husband wouldn't, I know. And then it's such a pity, Charlie, that you don't remember our own mother. She was such a beautiful lady,—a great deal prettier than anybody I've ever seen since."

Frank did not mean any disparagement

to Mrs. Betts, but he had an indefinable shrinking in his heart from living always with her, though she had been so good to them.

It was such a May morning as is seen nowhere out of California,—clear and sunny and balmy, with soft breezes, and yet cool enough to be inspiring. By the time the short sail across the bay was over, and the boys, following the telegraph-wires according to direction, had reached the mouth of the cañon, or great gulch, where the stage-road turned off toward Martinez, even Charlie began to think the long walk would be a very pleasant thing. The brook in the cañon was running full, and the rocky, precipitous sides were covered with a thick mantle of green, blossoming everywhere with strange-looking wild-

flowers; here a large boulder buried under the green leaves and brilliant bell-shaped flowers of some creeping plant, and there a shrub, almost large enough to be called a tree, making the whole air fragrant with its crown of blossoms, — scarcely any thing in the whole picture looking familiar to the boys, except the white flowers and green fruit of the blackberry vine.

“O Frank! isn’t it nice, though?” cried Charlie, his exhilaration fairly bringing the color to his pale cheek; “and I ain’t tired a bit.”

“I told you so,” said Frank exultingly: “we both shall feel a great deal better. And, somehow, it ain’t half so lonesome out here, — it seems to me as if father and mother were nearer to us. I do think a

great city like San Francisco is the lonest place in the world when anybody is in trouble, — people, people everywhere, coming and going; and not one among them all that cares what becomes of you.”

“It isn’t so lonesome here, at any rate,” said Charlie, taking off his cap: “let us sit down and rest a little, Frank. How still it is! only the birds and the running water; and that does sound so much like home! Don’t you wish we had a little house in such a place as this, and could live all by ourselves?”

“Yes, indeed I do,” said Frank, pondering in his mind whether such a thing were possible.

The road wound through the ravine gradually, till a summit was reached, whence there was a fine view beyond.

Just before reaching the top of this eminence, the boys turned aside and sat down in the shade, by the streamlet, to eat their lunch.

“You’re tired, aren’t you, Charlie?” said Frank, unfastening the burden from his back, and stretching himself at full length on the grass. “We’ve walked a long way, and it must be past noon: now we’ll have a good rest and a good meal before we go on.”

Charlie did not complain, and he did full justice to the nice things that had been provided for them.

“Now, Charlie,” said Frank, when the former had declared himself sufficiently rested to proceed, and they were shouldering their burdens. “I’m going to shoot two

or three birds, if I can, this afternoon; and after we stop for the night, maybe I can kill a rabbit, for I heard that they come out just at twilight; and I'll show you what an excellent supper I can get." Charlie looked at his brother admiringly, and then followed on. Up over the summit they went, stopping a few moments to gaze and enjoy; and then the road, cut in the mountain-side, led them down into a more beautiful valley beyond. Frank's contemplated two or three birds proved to be half a dozen; and never hunter bagged game more exultingly. The sun went down, and Charlie's feet began to grow heavy. "I believe I am getting tired, Frank," he said.

"So you must be, and we won't go a


step farther. You've stood it bravely, too. You just sit down and rest, while I go and look out a good place to camp, and I'll come and tell you."

i



CHAPTER V.

FIRST NIGHT IN CAMP.

 HIS narrow valley, or cañon, as they call it in California, was wider than that through which they had passed in the morning, and the stream that wandered through it was a little larger, and musical with many cascades. Bay-trees and willows mingled with the shrubbery by the brookside ; and the hills on either hand were not so steep, and in many places covered almost to their tops with fields of barley and wheat, full grown, but not yet beginning to ripen. Here, too, as all along their road, there were signs of busy life. A dilapidated cabin stood on one side, and

on the other a shed with a large yard attached. Frank had crossed the brook, and scrambled up among the bushes on the other side. Presently he came back.

“I’ve found such a splendid place, Charlie, between two queer-looking trees, — I don’t know what to call them: we’ll make our bed under one of them; and the leaves and branches are so thick, there can’t a bit of wind or dew touch us.”

Charlie gathered up his aching limbs, and stumbled across the stream and up the bank. He was more tired than he liked to confess.

“Now, Charlie, isn’t this comfortable? I think it is better than a parlor,” said Frank. “Lay your head on the blankets here, and take it easy, while I fix things. I’m going to make up our bed first, and

then I'll build a fire;" and he bustled about as if he had laid aside all his weariness with his blankets and game-bag.

Taking out his pocket knife, he proceeded to cut branches of the young red-wood, and lay them thickly over the ground at the foot of the tree.

"Let me see—we want something to make it soft," he said, thinking aloud. "Oh, I know;" and he brought armful after armful of the tall ferns that grew thickly beyond the open space where they were. It was the same familiar plant so common at the East; but which, in the richer soil of California, often grows to the height of four or five feet, and at the Sandwich Islands assumes the gigantic proportions of a tree several feet in diameter, and sometimes sixty or seventy feet high.

“Now for the blankets, — the single one for a sheet, and then the double ones. There, Charlie, try it, and tell me if it isn’t a bed fit for a prince.”

Charlie concluded it was; and he smiled as cheerfully as he used to do, before these dark days came upon them.

“Here’s two, four, six birds,” Frank continued, taking his prizes, one by one, from the bag, — “three quails, and three pigeons; that’s plenty for supper, and I don’t believe I’ll go after any rabbits to-night. It’s late, and you are hungry; besides, I guess I do feel a little tired. I’ll go and get some chips I saw down here a piece, and have a fire going in less than no time.”

“I might go and pick up some wood,” said Charlie, raising himself on his elbow.

“ Oh, no ! you just lie still. I can get all the wood I want in ten minutes or so. I know how to make a fire out of doors as well as any other fellow.”

So Charlie laid himself back on his pillow of ferns, with a most delicious sensation of rest and utter content, and watched his brother as he brought the wood, blew up a bright blaze, and then took the birds down to the brook to dress them. This done, and the spitting and roasting before the fire duly completed, Frank spread out the large towel with which Mrs. Betts had provided them, for a tablecloth, and was proceeding to lay out the supper, when there was a great cracking among the bushes, and a tall man, with a huge black beard and a gray flannel shirt, suddenly made his appearance. Charlie

cowered down under the blankets, and even Frank, kneeling on the ground, with both hands full of sandwiches, grew a little white about the mouth.

“What under the sun are you two chaps building a fire here for?” asked the stranger, pushing his slouched hat up from his eyes.

“To cook our supper,” answered Frank.

The man glanced at the game-bag and the gun, and then said, in a pleasant tone, “Well, well, you’re a couple of small covies to be out on a hunt! Going to camp, eh? What kind o’ game you got?”

“Three quails and three pigeons; and I shot them myself,” said Frank, getting the better of his fears.

“Well done! but you’d better keep

shady about it. It's agin the law to shoot quails this time o' year."

"Is it?" asked Frank: "I didn't know that. I haven't been in California many days. Why, I wonder?"

"'Cause they're layin' their eggs and hatchin' now. The law ain't off till the fifteenth of September. But I guess nobody 'll trouble you. I don't think such chaps as you two will be likely to clean out the game in these parts very bad."

"I sha'n't kill any more, though," said Frank earnestly: "I mean to do right."

"That's the talk," said the man; "but I shouldn't ha' thought your father and mother would ha' let you come this fur alone."

"We haven't any father or mother," exclaimed Frank; "and we didn't come to

hunt. We're going to Alamo, where our uncle lives ; and we thought this was the best and cheapest way to travel."

" You bet," said the man ; " you're a couple of trumps, I reckon. I'd ask you to turn in with me, but the fleas and bed-bugs might not leave much of you by mornin'. You've got better quarters, I guess, and you've got a mighty good supper too,—that's so. I say," he added, poking his head through the bushes after he had turned to go, " don't you want some milk to drink ? Come up to the corral over there, in half an hour or so, and I'll give you some. And you two chaps look out for your fire. I shouldn't like to have my val'able house burned down."

" We will, sir, and thank you," said Frank ; " and please, sir, you don't think

it is likely to rain these nights, do you?"

"Bless you, no! we ain't had a drop o' rain since March, and sha'n't have till November or December, maybe. You'll see the confoundedest, driest, dustiest time about two months from this, that ever you did see,—grass all withered up by the roots. Then if you come making fires anywhere around my barley-fields, I shall tell you to vamoose."

"What is that?" asked Frank, wonderingly.

"Git," said the man, disappearing down the bank.

The boys looked at each other. "Aren't you afraid?" asked Charlie under his breath. "What a queer man! and what do you suppose he came here for?"

“ Oh, only to see what we were doing. He wouldn’t harm us,” replied Frank. “ By and by I’ll go over to his yard — what did he call it? — and get you a drink of milk.”

“ You wouldn’t, would you ? ” said Charlie, still in a half-frightened tone : “ you wouldn’t dare to.”

“ Why not ? I’ve no doubt he’s a real kind man. Rough men, like him, sometimes have the best hearts. Well, now, Charlie, every thing is ready, and it is an excellent supper, and no mistake.”

Whatever Charlie’s apprehensions might have been, he soon lost them all in his enjoyment of this meal by the camp-fire; and his brother’s boundless satisfaction showed itself in every feature, and found expression in the oft-repeated exclamation, “ How good it does taste ! ”

So the twilight deepened, and the birds dropped off their leafy homes one by one, till only an old owl in a tree-top near by was calling out his one note in the gathering darkness.

“What’s that?” asked Charlie, drawing a little closer to his brother.

“Why, Charlie, don’t you know? It’s only an owl; I’ve heard them often at home: it sounds as natural as can be. He’s asking, ‘Who, who?’ It’s none of your business who we are, Mr. Owl, and I think we won’t tell you.”

Frank replenished the fire, and, taking out his little pocket Testament, read aloud reverently, “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all num-

bered. Fear ye not, therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows."

Then they lay down on their fragrant bed, with the brook singing beside them, and the stars looking down upon them out of the far-away blue.

"Let us say 'Our Father' together," said Frank, clasping his brother's hand, "just as mother taught us, when you first began to talk."

"Charlie," said Frank in a half-whisper, breaking the silence that fell between them, when their prayer was finished, "didn't that about the sparrows seem just meant for us? It never sounded so to me before. And I don't mean to be troubled, if I do find that we are alone in this strange country. Once, when we were at home, I learned a verse that ended this

way : 'Trust in God and do the right.' And that's just what I mean to do. There's thousands of birds in these trees and bushes, and yet God takes care of every one of them, and gives them every thing they want. And he'll take care of us."

Charlie did not speak, but his brother's words went down into his heart and comforted him just as the mother's soothing comforts her tired babe. Presently he said, "See the stars, Frank: they look down on us so kind, just as mamma's eyes used to look. I don't remember hardly any thing about mamma, but her pretty dark eyes."

Frank looked up through the overhanging branches into the quiet sky, and thought.

And so with dreamy, mingled thoughts of the birds and the stars and their mother's beautiful eyes, and the wide encircling love and care of the All-father, sleep stole down on the eyelids of the weary children; and who shall say that He did not "give his angels charge concerning them," lest any shadow of harm should fall on them?



CHAPTER VI

THE SEARCH.

IT'S no use, Frank, and I'm tired of inquiring. We shall never find him. We've asked everybody since we first spoke to the man at the Walnut-Creek House."

Charlie was discouraged. His heart felt like lead, and he showed far more weariness and languor than he had done before since they left San Francisco.

"We'll try once more, Charlie; we'll ask the postmaster. I remember once, when father wanted to find a man, he wrote to the postmaster of the place where he had lived. You know, five or six times

to-day, we've seen men who said they used to know him; and it's very strange that nobody can tell what has become of him."

"Frank Larue," said the man in the postoffice, meditatively, when the boys had, as it seemed to them, for the fiftieth time repeated their one inquiry,—"seems to me I remember a young man of that name; but it's three or four years ago."

"It's almost five years since we heard from him, and he was living somewhere in Alamo then. He was our mother's brother, and we want so much to find him," said Frank, looking earnestly in the man's face.

"What possessès folks in California not to write to their friends!" remarked the postmaster snappishly, going on with his work of sorting the mail.

"Where did you two fellows come from?" asked a bystander, looking curiously at the blankets and gun.

"From San Francisco, sir," answered Frank.

"On the stage?"

"No, sir: we walked all the way. You see, sir," Frank added, with a vague longing for some one's advice and sympathy, 'father and Charlie and I came on 'The Golden Age,' the last time she came in; and father died just a few days afterward, and we expected to find our uncle here."

The questioner gave a long, low whistle: "And haven't you got any mother?"

"No, sir: mother died five years ago," said Frank, clearing his throat once or twice, before he could bring the words out

distinctly. His heart was very full, but he was making a brave effort to keep up.

Quite a knot of loungers by this time had gathered around the children. "Call Uncle Billy," said one: "there he goes. He knows everybody that's been in these parts for the last ten years."

Uncle Billy came. "Know Frank Larue? To be sure I did," said he, when the question had been put to him. "I worked for him the last six months he was here. He was ranching then; and such a big yield of wheat and barley as we threshed that year, you never did see: he was making money hand over fist. But the Washoe fever broke out then, and he took it awful — had the reglar quartz on the brain" —

"Did he die?" interrupted both the boys breathlessly.


"Bless their hearts!" the old man went on, "they don't know what I am talking about. I didn't mean he was sick, only he was bewitched and bejuggled about mining. Go, he would; and he went up to Virginia City; but I heard afterward that he didn't stay there long. He went off prospecting with a lot of fellows, and goodness knows where he'd bring up. He was a nice likely young man as ever was, but he'd a dreadful rovin' disposition. If you are looking for him, my boy, you might as well hunt a flea in the chaparral."

Not trusting himself to speak another word, Frank shouldered his blankets, and the two boys went out of the office.



CHAPTER VII.

DESOLATE AND ALONE.

UT into the street they went, and down the length of it, to where the line of straggling heterogeneous buildings, on either hand, that formed the embryo village of Alamo, ceased. There some lumber had been thrown out by the roadside ; and Frank sat down, drawing his brother to a seat beside him. He was not sorry that the long spring twilight was merging at length into darkness, that would be a friendly screen from the curious gaze of passers-by ; for he felt as if all the courage and manliness were fast oozing out of his heart. He had tried to be pre-

pared for this: he had said to himself many times since they set out on this journey, that there was not much probability of their finding their uncle. He had in his mind several half-formed plans of what it would be best for them to do in such a contingency; and yet, underneath and back of all this, there was always a charming picture of a warm welcome and a country home with Uncle Frank, and a love and care that should almost make up to them for what they had lost.

But now this bright picture, toward which hope had steadily turned, in spite of all misgivings, had vanished past recall, and left them alone in the dark. Frank could not think of one of his plans just then: he could only sit and hold his brother's hand, and let his tears fall

silently ; while Charlie sobbed aloud with weariness and disappointment. Things that looked very feasible to him the day before did not seem at all so now. He had no heart to "camp out" that night, or to make a fire and cook game, even if he had had any to cook. They had eaten the last of their supply of cakes and sandwiches at their wayside lunch that day ; and, though too much excited and troubled to be hungry, Frank began to feel faint and dizzy for want of food.

"If we only had some one to tell us what to do !" he said unconsciously putting his mental longing into words.

"I don't see what is to become of us to-night," said Charlie. "I can't go any farther, I'm so faint and tired, and it's getting very dark. There are plenty of

houses here, Frank : don't you think some of these folks would let us stay all night ? ”

Charlie's pitiful tone recalled his brother's scattered senses. He felt for his money,—the four five-dollar gold pieces which he had stitched into a linen belt his father had used on their voyage, and worn fastened under his jacket,—and then made up his mind.

“ We won't ask them, Charlie ; that would be too much like begging ; but I'll tell you what we will do. There's a hotel back there a little way, for I noticed the sign ; and we'll go there to-night, and have a good bed and something to eat : we haven't spent a dime of our money yet. We've got to be just as careful as can be of every cent, I know, but we needn't be

misers. If we only use it when we need it as much as we do to-night, more will come when this is gone, I feel pretty sure. Come, Charlie, it is only a few steps : take hold of my hand, and we'll soon be there."

Up the street again, a very short walk brought them to the rather ambitious-looking two-story hotel.

"Please, sir," said Frank, when the proprietor had been pointed out to him by one of the idlers around the bar, "we want some supper and a bed, — my brother and I ; and if you please," he added, a little tremblingly, "we want to know how much it will cost."

A broad smile went around the circle, and the landlord cast an amused, quizzical glance at these unsophisticated guests ; but he answered good-naturedly, —



"Please, sir, said Frank, we want some supper and a bed."

'Orphan Brothers,' page 70.



“Want to know the figures, eh, my boy? Because, if our prices are too heavy, I suppose you couldn’t stand the pressure. Well, well, we’ll try to accommodate you, and come within your means.”

“I saw those same youngsters over at the postoffice a while ago, looking for somebody or something that belonged to them,” said a man who sat by the table with a newspaper in his hand.

“Queer little chaps! I wonder what they’re tramping around in this way for.”

The children followed a waiter to the dining-room, Charlie feeling safe and comforted at finding himself once more in a house, and Frank relieved to find that his night’s entertainment would not draw so heavily on his purse as he had feared; and yet a little mortified at having done some-


thing, he did not know exactly what, that had drawn upon him the laughter of the company in the bar-room.

A plentiful meal, and a night of that profound, restful slumber known only to childhood, which no grief and no anxiety has power to banish or disturb, was like a recreation to our two heroes. Charlie's tears were dried, and Frank felt as if he had the courage to try to look again into the cloudy future.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE NEW RESOLVE.

ET us not eat breakfast here, Charlie," said Frank, in the early morning, as he looked out from behind the window curtain into the quiet street. "I'll go over to the store, across the way, as soon as it is open, and buy some bread and cheese and crackers, and we'll go away out into some still, shady place, and have our breakfast. It won't cost half so much; and then I can think what we'd better do. Somehow, I can't think here."

So Frank paid his bill, and shouldered his gun and his traps; and the boys turned their backs on the would-be village of

Alamo before the sun was well up. Some distance over a level road they walked, till the murmur of a rivulet and the shadowing branches of some tall button-ball trees seemed to offer a pleasant resting-place; and they turned from their path, and, sitting down on the bank, took out their bread and cheese. Almost in silence they ate their breakfast this morning, not even noticing, in their pre-occupation, that one or two rabbits peeped slyly out from the chaparral behind them; while a gray squirrel, whose hole was near by, put out his nose as far as he dared, and sniffed the scent of crumbs, and thought what a delicious meal he would have when they were gone away; while a dozen or more birds, in the branches overhead, watched the falling fragments with the same interest.

When they had finished, Frank still sat dipping the end of a twig in the clear running water.

“What are you going to do, Frank? Ain’t you going back to San Francisco?” asked Charlie at length, putting both hands on his brother’s knee and looking up into his face.

Charlie never thought of deciding, or helping to decide, any matter himself. All the faith and trust he had put in his lost parents centered now in his brother. So he sat and waited for Frank’s words as for an oracle.

“I don’t know, Charlie: I can’t bear to go back there. Just so sure as we do, they’ll put me in one place and you in another, and we sha’n’t get to see each other more than once or twice a week,

and maybe not so often. I know how it will be. When I was in the doctor's office, the day we came away, he said he had a place picked out for me, where I could only earn my board for a whole year. And he talked about getting you into the orphan asylum. I couldn't bear that, Charlie. If we can't be together, where I can take care of you, as father and mother told me to, I don't want to live at all."

"It isn't right to say that, Frank," said Charlie, feeling, however, a blessed sense of protection and rest in this one human love, out of all the world, that centered in him, — this great love, strong and invincible as death itself, even though it swelled only in the bosom of a child: "it's not right to feel so, when God takes care of us, as he does of the sparrows we read about."

“Maybe not,” Frank answered, holding up the twig, and letting the shining drops roll off into the stream below; “but I can’t help it. I know God will take care of us in some way, though we can’t see how; but I want we should be together. I can work, and I’m not afraid of work; but I’d want to be where I could sleep with you at night, and tuck you in, as I remember mother used to do, and know that you were warm and well. Then how could I know but people might be cross and hard with you, and I not there to take your part. I couldn’t live anywhere without you, Charlie, and it wouldn’t be of any use to try. I couldn’t eat or sleep, and I shouldn’t have any heart to work.”

Just then the gray squirrel, getting a little impatient, ventured a half-frightened

chatter from the mouth of his hole. Charlie looked up. "There's a squirrel just popped his head out of that hole. And how thick the birds are in these trees ! I suppose there's ever so many nests up there among the leaves. Oh, dear ! every thing has got a home but us."

Frank thought of these words, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head ;" and his perplexed, childish heart sent up a voiceless cry for light and help and guidance to the great One who had once been houseless and homeless in the world.

"I wish," continued Charlie, "we had a little house, like the man's who talked to us the first night we slept out: don't you remember ? And then we could live all

alone by ourselves, as nicely as we pleased."

Frank looked at his brother, his face brightening for a moment, "— So we could ; but then," he added presently, settling back into the old despondent look, "we haven't got any house ; and, even if I knew how to build one, I shouldn't have any thing to make it of."

"Couldn't you buy something ?" asked Charlie, unwilling to give up the pleasant idea.

Frank shook his head. "I guess it would take a great deal of money — more than we've got," he said ; but he laid up his brother's suggestion, and turned it over and over many times, during the day and afterward.

The bright May sun climbed higher and

higher, and still the boys sat and talked under the button-ball trees, till the rabbits left off peeping, and went away back into the thick brushes, and the birds and the squirrels were out of all patience.

“There is this we might do,” said Frank, starting up at last, and preparing to take up his burden: “let us walk along through this valley for a day or two, and see if we can’t find a place for us both among some of these farmers. There’s more work that boys can do in the country; and then country people don’t think so much of one’s board. Then we’ve always been used to the country, Charlie; we shouldn’t like the city any way: I know I shouldn’t. I believe this is the best plan. I’ll be looking out for some game to-day, and we’ve a bag full of bread

and crackers ; we can sleep out a night or two again, very comfortably. And if we can't get any kind of a place, we'll think about going back to the city ; but somehow I feel that we can not think for ourselves, nor plan for ourselves : let us kneel down here in the shade under these bushes, and ask God to show us where to go and what to do."

And the two orphans, with hearts hungering and thirsting for sympathy, and yearning for a strong hand to take hold of in their weakness and perplexity, knelt down on the dead leaves, in the thick shade of the encircling and overhanging branches, while the elder, for the first time in his life, sent up, in his own words, to the throne of the Infinite Father, earnest


supplications for divine guidance and protection. The words were few and simple, and the sentences broken and lame ; but they went up out of the depths of a heart that felt its need : and who shall say they were not more acceptable and more pleasing in the sight of God than the sweetest incense or the choicest formula of words that ever arose from church or cathedral ? God listens to us the most tenderly when we feel our helplessness the most, and come to him for his protection and blessing. And he listened to these, his little ones, so lonely and friendless, that beautiful morning ; for they arose from their knees, feeling calm, patient, and trustful, and strengthened with a new courage and resolution for the battle of life.

“ Somehow I feel better,” said Frank :
“ I know God will take care of us, and I
am willing to do just what he may think is
best.”



CHAPTER IX.

HOPING ON, HOPING EVER.

N all the length and breadth of fair and fertile California, there is scarcely a more beautiful tract of country than that which, embosomed in the Coast Range, stretches in a succession of small valleys from the Straits of Carquines half the distance to Los Angeles,—green and lovely valleys they are, dotted with trees and enlivened by running streams; and, in the days before American enterprise had turned them into granaries, looking, at some seasons of the year, like mountain-locked seas, covered with gorgeous rainbow-hued waves of wild flowers. At the

time of which I write, however, though the plow and the harrow and the growing wheat and barley had held supreme sway for some years, they had not quite rooted out and choked all these strange-looking, splendidly-painted blossoms; for the two brothers found them springing thickly up by the wayside, and asserting their prior claim wherever in the fields the scattered grain-seeds had failed to effect a lodgment. Many of the distant hillsides also showed patches of brilliant colors; and the wondering admiration of the children, fresh from the more sterile soils of the Eastern States, almost made them forget, for the time, their orphanhood and homelessness.

So, leisurely on, six or seven miles beyond Alamo, through the wide, rich San Ramon Valley they kept their way, making at

every ranch, and almost every dwelling, their unsuccessful application for employment and a home.

“ Oh, I don’t want to be bothered with boys: they’re more plague than profit,” said one ranchero, stooping to pick out the early potatoes from the hill he had just uncovered.

“ Hard case,” said another, stopping his team while he listened to them: “ folks that’s willing to work ought to have a chance, whether they’re big or little; but then the best way’s for you to get into some family. You see we’re ranching alone, — I and another fellow; and we stop in the cabin over there, and cook our own grub, and ain’t got nary woman to our name, either on us; so what could we do with a couple of youngsters like you ? ”

“Want two boys to work!” said a third, who was repairing the fence in front of a snug-looking dwelling, which resembled, more than any thing they had hitherto seen, the pleasant farm-houses at the East. “I’ve got more boys of my own than I know what to do with. You just look over in that gulch back of the house.”

Frank and Charlie looked in the direction indicated, and counted six or seven heads of all sizes bobbing up and down beside the brook; some displaying only Nature’s covering of flaxen hair, and some with hats and caps in all stages of dilapidation.

“There!” exclaimed the man, with a covert exultation in his tone that belied his words, “don’t that look as if I wanted more boys? It’s a fact, I’ve had to put up

a tier of shelves, one above the other, in my house, so I could stow them all away at night. Tell you what, California's a famous State for big squashes and boys ! ”

But notwithstanding these rebuffs, the children kept up their courage and spirits bravely. It was a glorious day ; and, wandering as they did through ever-shifting scenes of beauty, it would have been hard to resist the cheering influences that poured in upon them from every side. Larks and wild doves, and other small birds, abounded everywhere ; and Frank brought down a goodly number of them during that day's walk, carefully respecting, however, the rights of the quails. And when the twilight came on, and our young travelers began to look for a sheltered spot in which to spend the night, they were thrown into a

great state of excitement by seeing a long-eared, gray-coated rabbit, followed presently by a second and then a third, run across the path directly before them. The shy little creatures had ventured out from their coverts in search of food. Said Frank, in a quick, eager whisper, "Don't move, Charlie. Hold your breath a minute, can't you? and I'll have that one. Don't you see him cocked up under the bushes looking at us?"

Whether Charlie was able to hold his breath sixty full seconds, I do not know; but, after the lapse of something more than that time, he heard each barrel of the gun fired in quick succession, and his brother came out of the thicket into which he had crawled, triumphantly holding up two of the smooth-furred little animals by the ears.

“O Frank, what pretty little creatures ! It seems such a pity to kill them.”

“It does seem a pity,” answered Frank, turning them over half regretfully ; “but then you and I must have something to eat !”

Charlie sat down on the bank and smoothed the soft fur on the yet warm and palpitating little bodies, and puzzled his young brain about the ethics of hunting in general, and of killing birds and squirrels and rabbits in particular, while his brother, having selected a desirable spot, commenced his out-of-door housewifely preparations ; and whatever conclusion the former arrived at, it certainly did not affect the appetite he brought to the meal that was soon in readiness.

“Well, I’m sure, we’re very comfortable to-night,” said Frank, as they sat by their

fire after supper, and watched the stars coming out : “ I wonder if game is as plenty as this all the year round ? If it is, there wouldn’t be any danger of starving, as long as we had powder and shot.”

“ No,” replied Charlie ; “ and I wish ” —

He did not finish his sentence, and Frank asked no questions ; but, after they lay down to sleep, each one pondered, in his own mind, the possibility of managing to make some kind of a dwelling in one of these sequestered spots, where they might live together, and be independent and happy. Robinson Crusoe had lived so, with far less available means of subsistence ; and why should not they ?


And so, while the shadows of the night deepened around their leafy covert, with thoughts busy with the future, and with

— hearts brimming over with gratitude to the kind Father who had led them on thus far, and with a hope, a cheerfulness, and a resolution such as they had never felt before, they closed their eyes, and slept that long, sweet, restful sleep, which never comes but to the trustful, the submissive, and the innocent.



CHAPTER X.

THE HOUSE IN THE CAÑON.

EAVING the road they had been traveling, a mile or two beyond their stopping-place, they passed, the next morning, through the hills, and entered another valley, greener and richer, if possible, than the one they had left, but not so wide, and soon terminating in a narrow pass between the mountain ranges that shut it in.

“What do they call this valley?” asked Frank, of a teamster they met.

“Maraga,” answered the man.

“A queer name; but it’s the prettiest place we’ve seen yet,” was Frank’s comment.

On they went, making everywhere the same inquiry; but no home opened to them, — no roof, whether lofty or lowly, seemed to offer any shelter to them. They were beginning to loose their buoyancy, to feel weary and dejected, and to experience a little of the heartsickness of hope deferred.

A little past noon they had reached the farther end of the valley, where the mountains came almost together, and, passing around the foot of the rocky rampart on their right, found themselves on the borders of a cañon, wild and beautiful beyond description, with steep, thickly-wooded sides, and a stream, whose waters, clear and still and sparkling, flowed with many a mimic whirlpool and cataract all along down the bed of the ravine.

Soothed and refreshed at once by the delicious coolness and melodious quiet of this retreat, the tired, heated boys sat down to rest.

“Isn’t it splendid?” exclaimed Frank: “now we will just find a good place to stop, and we won’t go a step farther to-day. Such places as these were just made to camp in.”

“Somebody lives here too,” remarked Charlie. “See! there’s a house, and there’s a horse tied over across the brook.”

“Yes, I see: it’s a funny-looking house, isn’t it?”

It was a cabin, standing quite near the bank of the stream, and not far from the place where they had entered the ravine, built of redwood “shakes,” or pieces of redwood, split out with an axe so as to re-

semble clap-boards somewhat, with a chimney made of sticks of the same wood, laid up after the fashion of children's cob-houses, and nailed together, the interstices being filled with mud.

"The door is open," said Charlie, when the two boys had looked at the uncouth dwelling for a time in silence: "let us just walk by, and see if there's anybody in there."

"That wouldn't be very well bred, would it?" said Frank hesitating.

"Oh! we needn't stare: we'll only go right by."

But, before they had time to get within range of the door, they were suddenly accosted with,—

"Well, I declare! if you two fellows haven't turned up again."

And, looking up, they recognized with a throb of joyful surprise, as if they had found an old friend, the same slouched hat and black beard and gray-flannel shirt that had greeted them at their first night's encampment, on the other side of Alamo.

“ I thought you was goin' to Alamo, to your uncle's or cousin's or something. How in creation did you come over here ? ” and the questioner sat down in the doorway.

The boys sat down also, one on each side of the rough redwood log that formed the door-step, considering themselves invited by the man's tone, if not in words ; and then Frank told his simple, straightforward story of their disappointment and forlornness, their determination to keep together, and their present search for employment,

his listener evincing far more interest in his tale than any one else had done, since they left kind Mrs. Betts.

“Don’t think you’ll stand much show,” said the man, shaking his head slowly, when Frank ceased. “California’s a dreadful fast country: most folks don’t feel as if they’d got any home for themselves, let alone other people: they’re jest a waitin’ to make their pile, and then they’re a calculatin’ to go off home, or somewhere else. And you can’t hardly expect to keep together: it’s a hard world, and you will have to do as you can. Better go back to ’Frisco, I should think.”

“Is this your house?” asked Frank suddenly, after a pause: “I thought you lived away over in the other cañon.”

“So I do mostly. But I knocked this

cabin together last year, when I was a-gettin' wood down off the mountain, and used to be here, off and on, considerable."

"And doesn't any one live in it when you are away?" Frank questioned further, with a glistening in his eyes.

"Nary soul. But I come over once in a while to look after my traps; and along the latter end of the dry season, I shall be here again haulin' wood."

"O sir!" said Frank earnestly, "would you be so kind as to rent it to us for a while? and how much would the rent be?"

The stranger looked at their eager, sober faces, and then he laughed a loud, hearty peal of laughter, that echoed far down along the ravine, while the children sat half frightened, half puzzled, at this unexpected burst of merriment.

“ You’re a couple of bricks, you bet ! ” said he at length, when he had regained his composure. “ Going to set up housekeeping ? Where do you ’spect to git your grub ? ”

Frank looked mystified.

“ I say, how are you going’ to git any thing to eat ? ”

“ Oh ! I’ve got powder and shot. I can kill game enough to make all the meat we’ll want for some time ; and I’ve got a little money to start with. I can buy some flour, and make bread. Besides, a good many of the men, where I asked for work, said they’d be glad of a boy for a day or two when they are busy. I think I could earn enough to get along and take care of Charlie.”

“ Well, well, you’ve got the real stuff in

you, any how ;” and the speaker rose up from his low seat and leaned against the door. “ And you’re welcome to stay in my house just as long as you want to, which’ll be till about to-morrow mornin’, I reckon ; and there’s part of a sack of flour and some white beans in that box, you can have to start with.”

“ And we can use the wood we pick up in the gulch, can’t we ? ”

“ Oh, yes ! burn up the whole side of the mountain, if you want to, only don’t burn the house up. But I must be goin’ ; I’ve got to git back to the corral to-night.”

The boys followed him with excited faces and eager thanks, as he crossed the brook, saddled his small-sized shaggy pony, of native breed, and rode away down the rude cart-track that ran through the cañon.

He did not ride far, however, before he turned his horse back, and reined up before a cabin by the brookside, built very much after the pattern of his own.

“Hollo, Mike!” he called.

“Hollo yersilf!” answered Mike, appearing in the doorway, “and how are you? I didn’t know ye was over.”

“I hain’t been over long; and I’m goin’ back to-night. What I wanted to tell you was, that I’ve left a couple o’ boys in my house, that don’t seem to belong to anybody. I told them they might stay as long as they liked; but I don’t s’pose that’ll be long. Whoa, there! can’t ye, till a feller finishes his yarn,” he interpolated, as the awkward, untrained animal he bestrode showed his displeasure at having his nose turned in the wrong direction, by a series of backings and

plunges forward and to one side. "I just wish your old woman would look after them a little, supposin' they do stay a while, and see that they don't go hungry, and get sick, nor nothin'. To be sure, they're nothin' to me; I never seen 'em till t'other day, when they was a-trampin' down by my place on t'other side: but they're little fellows, along about ten and twelve year old, and I feel kind o' soft-hearted about 'em. They think a deal of each other. That oldest one is like a reg'lar mother. If I'd ever had any livin' thing in the hull world to think as much o' me as he thinks o' that Charlie, I shouldn't ha' been the miserable sinner I am. If you'll kind o' have an eye after them, Mike, I'll make it all right with you. Git up and git, then, if you want to, you blasted uneasy rascal!"

And the unkempt mustang pony did “git,” tearing through the cañon, and over the brook, and popping his ugly head up into the valley road, with a flourish of his long, ragged tail, as if he had been a squirrel.



CHAPTER XI.

GETTING FIXED.



THE boys went back over the brook, and began to examine the interior of their new-found dwelling. It was almost as comfortless and as destitute of all civilized appurtenances as was Robinson Crusoe's cave, before his industry and inventive genius had been brought to bear upon it. There was no floor; but the warmth of frequent fires had rendered the earth, that served instead, hard and dry and solid. The two windows, on either side of the door, consisted of a half-sash, each hung on leather hinges nailed to the rude frame, with a wooden button on the other side to fasten them.

"Now, that's nice," remarked Frank, who saw every thing that afternoon through a rose-colored atmosphere. "You see, we can open and shut them just like doors; and isn't it lucky, there isn't a pane broken in them? I do so hate to see windows with old rags and such things stuffed in to stop the holes!"

"But how dirty they are! You can hardly see through them," said Charlie.

"Oh! I'll fix that to-morrow," replied Frank confidently.

"But, Frank, just look at the bed: we can't sleep on that, can we? I'd rather sleep on a bed of ferns and bushes out of doors; for that would be clean, and this isn't."

Charlie's tone was a little querulous. He was tired and worn; and he thought

longingly of the neat room, and the bed with its spotless drapery, they had shared at home in the East, and then of the comfortable quarters they had left at Mrs. Betts's in the city ; and he had half a mind to sit down and cry. He lacked his brother's indomitable hope and courage ; indeed, a very little show of hardship or difficulty was usually enough to shake his resolution.

Frank turned away from the window, and went to the corner where his brother stood. It certainly was not a very inviting-looking couch. The low bedstead, of home manufacture, was only a frame of unplanned red-wood nailed together ; and the straw mattress laid on it was suggestive of any thing but cleanliness or comfort : while all the other articles that pertain to a bed were entirely wanting.

“Oh! we won’t sleep on that thing, Charlie,” said Frank encouragingly. “Just take hold of one end of it, won’t you; and we’ll lay it over in the other corner. We’ll make a bed for to-night, just as we used to when we slept out of doors; and then, to-morrow, I’ll see what I can do.”

But the wide fire-place of stones and mud, laid up in quite workmanlike solidity, did certainly look comfortable and cheery.

“See,” said Frank: “we can have as nice a fire as we want; plenty of wood all around: and here’s something that used to be the handle of an old fire-shovel, I guess, laid across on the stones, where we can hang a kettle to cook.”

“But we haven’t got any kettle,” said Charlie.

After some minutes’ search, however,

an old kettle was found. Rusty and dirty enough, it certainly was; but Frank declared that a good scrubbing with sand, and some soap from the piece he had in his bag, and hot water, would make it over about as good as new. This kettle, with a good water-pail, a cracked plate, and an old knife, were the only household utensils to be found on the premises.

“Oh, dear me! I don’t see how we are going to live here,” sighed Charlie.

“Why, Charlie! don’t be discouraged so soon,” urged Frank: “we can’t expect to have every thing the first day. Remember how Robinson Crusoe did.”

“But he had a ship to go to and get things, and we haven’t,” persisted Charlie.

An impatient answer trembled on Frank’s lip; but he glanced up at his brother’s

pale face, and somehow the words would not come: he only said tenderly, "How tired you look! Here, I'll spread a blanket down on the bank under the trees out there, and you lie down and rest, till I can fix a bed and build a fire, and get something to eat."

So, having made his brother comfortable for the time, Frank set about lighting a fire in the ample stone fire-place, and cutting redwood branches and ferns to lay on the top of the rough bedstead, in place of the mattress he had discarded; and then he proceeded to hold a silent conversation with himself about ways and means for getting up a supper. He had a tolerable supply of birds, and one rabbit that he had killed in the morning; but their bread was gone: only two crackers remained, and

these he put by carefully for Charlie. There was the flour in the box, as the man had told them, — almost a whole sack ; but Frank had some misgivings about attempting to make bread that evening. He did not think he remembered exactly how it was done : he wanted a little more time to think how old Sally, at grandfather's, used to make it. If he only had some potatoes, he thought, to boil in the kettle which he had scoured so clean ! Suddenly he remembered the white beans. It wouldn't be much trouble to cook these : he remembered that Sally used to boil them just like potatoes. It was a lucky thought ; and he proceeded to pick over, and wash, and put them on, as he had seen her do, and then left them to boil, while he went down to the brook to prepare his birds for broiling.

When all his preparations were completed, he lifted out the old table, lacking one leaf, that stood under one of the windows, and, setting out their meal as well as he could, put the one backless chair that the house contained, for Charlie; and bringing in, from out-doors, a piece of a redwood log for his own seat, went to call his brother.

Charlie had been asleep, and was in a much more cheerful humor. He ate his crackers and tender breast of broiled lark with evident relish; while Frank, rather uncomfortably conscious that his first meal was not a very auspicious inauguration of their Robinson-Crusoe life, went to the fire to transfer some of the boiled beans from the kettle to their one plate, with a flat piece of wood he had found; planning,

meanwhile, how he would whittle out some wooden spoons on the morrow.

"Eat some of these, Charlie," said he. "It's lucky I thought of them, or we shouldn't have had much but birds to-night."

"What's the matter with them?" asked Charlie presently, pushing the plate away: "they're as hard as bullets."

Frank tasted, and looked nonplussed. "I don't know," he said slowly. "I boiled them just as Sally used to at home: I don't see why they shouldn't be good."

"They're bad beans, I know," said Charlie pettishly: "I'd just throw them all away."

"Oh, no! I'll try again. I dare say they are good enough, if I had cooked them right. Oh! I know now," his blue eyes

lighting up with a sudden thought: "I guess I didn't boil them long enough. Never mind: I'll have some that are good to-morrow."

"Nothing ever seems to discourage you," said Charlie, half vexed that Frank could be so cheerful and hopeful, when things looked so dark and dismal to him. A tall, pale, delicate boy was Charlie, fond of books, but entirely wanting in his brother's practical skill and activity, and with a morbidly sensitive, despondent temperament, that sometimes made him peevish and morose. Yet his faith in his brother was almost boundless, and he clung to him with a passionate love and an utter dependence that made the latter seem necessary to his very existence.

"We've got our wish, Charlie," said

Frank, as they sat in the doorway after the sun went down. "We've got a little house all to ourselves, right here in the wildest, prettiest place we could have chosen ; and now we can live by ourselves, and do just as we please."

"Yes," said Charlie ; "but I didn't think how it would be. I meant a house all nice, just as it used to be at home."

Frank laughed. "You didn't suppose the fairies would come and bring us our food, and set our table, and wash our dishes, and make our bed for us, did you ? They don't do such things now-a-days : we've got to help ourselves."

"Yes, I know," said Charlie ; "and I don't see how we are going to get along a week."

"Oh, you'll see ! I'm going to get up

early in the morning, and see what I can do. There are plenty of people living all about here: there must be some place where I can buy a few things that we need right away. I'll contrive to make some bread to-morrow; and then, when we get a little settled, I'll go out among the farmers, and see if I can get a chance to work a day or two. If I find I can live, maybe I'll either go or send to San Francisco for our trunk."

Charlie did not speak; but he looked a little doubtful. Things did not seem so clear to him.

"I don't expect it's going to be for always," Frank went on, after they had sat some time in silence: "it may be only for a few weeks. Something will happen: it always does. We'll keep trying, and by and

by we'll find a house for us both, or else I shall get a place where I can earn enough to keep you. Any way, I think it is right to do as we are doing now, rather than go back to the city, and let them separate us, and send us where they please. That wouldn't be taking care of you at all."

Charlie drew closer, and laid his head on his brother's shoulder, as if the very suggestion of a separation had made him feel uneasy; and Frank understood the movement, and drew his arm close around him, thinking in his heart that he would try very hard to be father and mother both to him.

After a long silence, Frank added, "I feel, more than ever before in my life, to-night, that God is taking care of us; and that if we are good, and willing to do

what he thinks is best, and keep on trying, he will not let us suffer. I remember this little verse that I used to say to mother before she died: 'Trust in the Lord, and do good: so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.' Now, that's just what I want to do: I want to do good and exactly right, so that God will love to take care of me. I believe he has taken care of us to-day, Charlie, and directed us to this house for our home; and I feel to thank him."


So they sat till the new moon came up and looked at them through the trees; and then they went in, Frank saying, as he fastened the door of the rude cabin, "One thing is certain, Charlie: it's home where people love each other, if it's ever so rough." And so it is.

The two boys then knelt down beside their rude bed of bushes and ferns, and, with a simplicity and fervor which God and the angels love to hear, offered up their evening sacrifice of thanks and praise for the mercies of that day and that hour; and, young as they were, thus consecrated a family altar, — a Bethel in the wilderness, — as a memorial of what God had done for them, and as a token of their gratitude.



CHAPTER XII.

SUNSHINE ON THE PATH.

HE gray dawn had already begun to struggle in through the dirty windows of the little cabin, before Frank awoke. The rustic couch did feel comfortable, for he was very tired, and nature pleaded hard for a little indulgence; but he looked at his sleeping brother, and he was wide awake at once. Things must be made pleasanter for Charlie, and there was plenty of work for that day. But breakfast was the first thing; and what was to be done? He did not mind for himself; but Charlie must have something, and there was nothing at hand.

He took the gun, and went out into the still morning, feeling less independent and a good deal more doubtful than he had done the day before. He wondered if there were any wild fruits or berries up and down the ravine; and then he remembered that it was much too early in the season for that. He was half inclined to go back and make cakes of flour and water, and bake them in the ashes; but then Charlie could never eat such food. "If I could only get started!" he said to himself, as he cleared the brook with a bound. "But how to get started, — that's the question."

Meanwhile, in the other rough brookside dwelling, of the existence of which so near them the boys were not aware, Norah O'Connor sat opposite her husband

at their early breakfast. Norah was a pretty, tidy young wife, the earlier portion of whose married life had been spent at service in San Francisco, and whom nothing but the necessity of "takin' care o' Mike," had induced to come into this "rale wilderness." But Mike was doing a brisk business at wheat and barley raising on rented land, and, when not thus occupied, making as much or more by hauling wood down from the mountains; and Norah was sensible enough to see that the main chance must be looked after. Nevertheless, she grumbled a good deal, in a good-natured way, about "the lonesomest place that iver a woman was took to, — clear out of the world, with niver a friend or a cousin to drap in, and nobody at all to spake to;" while Mike looked at her ruddy

cheeks, and at his plump, round-eyed baby, and thought them better company than all the cousins and relations in the world.

So when, on the evening previous, her husband had delivered the message of their absent neighbor, Norah received it with real satisfaction, not only out of a genuine love of the exercise of kindness, but because the prospect of any thing was welcome that promised to break up the monotony of a few of the long summer days.

“I’m thinkin’ I’ll take baby and see afther the poor childer a bit this mornin’,” she said, as they rose from the table.

“All right,” responded he, giving his own child a series of hearty tossings and shakings, and then going off whistling to his work, while his brisk wife finished her

morning duties, and packing a basket with eatables, not forgetting a "drawin' of tay," and her own bright new tin teapot, set off on her benevolent errand.

When Frank returned from his early hunting, not overloaded with game, and frightened to see how high the sun had climbed, he was astonished beyond measure to find a bright fire on their hearth, a strange baby on their bed, and Norah O'Connor, neater and brighter than usual, making tea and toast for Charlie.

"An' this is yer brother that ye say takes care o' ye, and does for ye? To think of yer bein' all alone in this wild counthry! Sure, an' didn't I have a brother just the age o' this one, an' him and me all there was, whin me mither died, an' I said we'd always kape together? But there was Mike,

an' what could I do? I had to lave him with the grandmither in the ould counthry."

She brought another piece of toast to Charlie, her cheeks glowing with the heat of the fire, and her eyes full of the tears her home memories had brought. Then, sitting down on the bed to watch him, as he ate it, she said, by way of introduction for herself and answer to Frank's wondering glances, —

"I'm Mike O'Connor's wife, an' I'm livin' in the cabin just around the rocks there, close by; an' Mr. Carter, who stops here sometimes, asked me to look after ye a bit."

"Oh!" said Frank, with a quick understanding of matters, and a pleased, relieved look, "you are very kind. We thank you a thousand times."

“ Oh ! it’s nothin’ at all : it’s mesilf that just likes to have something to look afther onct in a while in this lonesome-like place. Now sit down till ye take a drap o’ tay an’ ate a bit : ye need it, I’m thinkin’.”

Frank sat down, and the two boys discussed the inviting breakfast ; while Norah, sitting on the bed, held her baby, and looked at them with a gratified face, asked questions, and listened to their story and their plans, pitied them and wondered, till she almost forgot that dinner must be ready for Mike at precisely twelve o’clock.

“ My sakes alive ! ” she exclaimed at length, in reply to an application from Frank for a little instruction in the art of bread-making : “ to think of two such little ones as yourselves a-kapin’ hoose all

alone with nobody at all to do for ye ! An' ye really think ye could make bread ! ”

“ I could try,” said Frank. “ Father always said there was nothing like trying. I'm pretty sure I could learn.”

“ Sure, an' there's quare things happenin' in the world. Come around to-morrow, thin, an' I'll show ye the best I can. An' ye can have an ould tin bake-oven that Mike had afore I come an' brought me cook-stove.”

Frank thanked her eagerly, with a very bright face.

“ An' I makes me yeast ivery week,” she went on ; “ an ye can have a bit, any time, as good an' lively as iver ye set eyes on, if I do say it mesilf. But what are ye going to do with the mattress ? ” she asked, pointing to the corner where it lay.

“Charlie thought he’d rather sleep on a bed of bushes,” said Frank with a queer smile.

“Well, I’ll tell you : just rip open one end, an’ shake out the sthraw, an’ bring it up to-morrow, an’ I’ll give it a good rub an’ a schald ; an’ when it’s dhry, we’ll fill it with new sthraw. Mike’s got some as clain an’ swate-smellin’, as the new-mown hay used to be in the ould counthry. An’ I must be goin’, or my man ’ll git niver a bite o’ dinner at all.”

So, pleased with herself and with the strange children she was befriending, and happier, as we all are, for her own kind deeds, Norah took her leave, accompanied by Frank, who insisted on carrying the baby home for her, thereby raising himself materially in her favor and good opinion.

Frank came back with a light heart. Things were certainly getting into a prosperous train with him. He went to work with a will, washing the two windows and making all as clean and comfortable as possible, stopping, now and then, to watch Charlie, who, contented and cheerful after his nice breakfast, wandered up and down the ravine, gathering bouquets, or fished with bent pin in the brook, or more frequently lay on his back in the shade, his heavy dark hair pushed back from his high white forehead, watching the birds and the restless leaves above him, and dreaming wide-awake dreams. Very wonderful dreams Charlie had sometimes,—strange and beautiful; and he would often repeat them to his brother, who liked nothing better than to listen, though he was too busy

and too practical ever to dream himself, either by day or by night. It was rest and recreation enough for Frank, at any time, to know that Charlie was comfortable and happy.

“How much he looks as mother used to!” the elder brother said to himself many times a day: “she had just such hair and eyes. Only I wish he would get fatter, and not look quite so pale.”

It never occurred to Frank that Charlie might lighten his labors, or assume any thing that was work, however trifling or easy. In his eyes his brother was always the one to be worked for and cared for, amused and made happy. “If I had not Charlie,” he reasoned, “what should I care for work, or rest, or any thing else in the world?”

In the afternoon, Frank borrowed a basket from his new-found friend, and, following her directions, started for the little store at the farther end of Maraga Valley, to purchase such necessities as they stood in immediate want of, Charlie remaining to take care of the house ; for Charlie was never lonely, and never unwilling to be left. Except his brother, his own thoughts were always the pleasantest company for him.

According to appointment, the boys went, the next day, to Mrs. O'Connor's, Frank minding baby to the mother's entire satisfaction, while she gave him his first lesson in bread-making ; her apt and watchful pupil soon comprehending more of the process than she would have known how to tell him in words. And when, after an excellent dinner, they went home, with

their bottle of yeast and tin oven, the new mattress, and some clean bedding Norah had insisted on lending them for the present, it seemed to them that they were in the full tide of prosperity and success ; and all difficulties and perplexities fled away, and hid their heads in the distant future. Even Charlie, as he curled down between the snow-white sheets that night, declared that it was "real pleasant," and "almost as good as home ;" and those words paid his brother amply for all his exertion and weariness.

Very busy and happy were the days that came after this. Frank gave his most earnest attention to his bread-making, and he succeeded admirably. Indeed, he improved on his copy so much, that if Mrs. O'Connor had seen the light, white loaves

that sometimes came out of the old tin oven, she might have felt almost jealous of her pupil. But she did not see, and Frank was not given to boasting. He was satisfied with having achieved a success, and never cared to speak of it. Moreover, Norah was the brothers' devoted friend. The warm Irish heart went out to them with a generous interest; the greater, perhaps, for the lack of all other neighborly or friendly intercourse. And, in return, Frank never omitted an opportunity of rendering her a service, however trifling. He was always at hand to mind baby on washing-days, or to go of an errand, or to help her when she had reapers or threshers to cook for, and, with an innate instinct of good-breeding, treating her at all times with the same polite respect he would have shown to the highest lady in the land.

“He’s a gintleman’s son, an’ a gintleman hissilf, all over !” Norah would say enthusiastically to her husband.

How many boys in this country are sufficiently well-bred as to be recognized anywhere and everywhere as gentlemen’s sons ?

As Norah always spoke a good word for Frank wherever she thought there was the least probability of obtaining employment for him, it was not long before she had the pleasure of telling him that a farmer in the valley wanted him for several days. Frank was in high spirits. The long-desired work had come at last ; and he felt as independent as if a shower of gold had already fallen around him. He was up in the long mornings before the earliest twilight, that he might leave every thing

nice and pleasant for Charlie, and yet be ready to begin his day's work promptly. And he brought all his energy and promptness to bear on the task allotted him, winning from the farmer the commendation, that, "only for liftin' and sich, he was every bit as good as a man."

And when the week was over, and he sat down with Charlie to enjoy the exquisite pleasure of counting his first earnings, what a happy time it was! How the boys talked and planned and handled the shining silver pieces over and over!

"Now, Charlie, you see it is all coming out just as I told you, though you couldn't see how. I shall earn all the money we want; and, by and by, I'll build a better house than this, and you shall have a nice little room for a library, and lots of books."

Charlie looked at his brother with eyes full of wondering admiration, and hadn't a word to say.

Mrs. O'Connor's kindness went still further, and obtained from her husband the promise of taking Frank in his big wagon to San Francisco, when he should go with a load of grain which he had reserved for a late sale and high prices, and of bringing for him the trunk that had been left there so long.

And when Charlie, after a few days, began to pine for "something to read," she searched to the bottom of her trunk, and brought to light an old torn book of fairy tales, that had found its way into her possession, "Sure, an' she couldn't tell how," at the place where she had last worked. It was an untold treasure to Charlie. His

imagination reveled in the wonderful stories, extravagant and nonsensical though they were. He wandered up and down the cañon, during the long days when his brother was away, searching out every wild secluded nook, and sitting wherever it was quietest and most inviting, to con the pages of his book, forgetting to watch the ripening of the blackberries up the brook, and, sometimes, even to eat the nice lunch his brother always left for him. He peopled the glen with fairies, sprites, and dwarfs; he watched the birds and squirrels and rabbits, and attributed to them all, even to the wild-flowers, a kind of human living and experience. He wondered whether the great boulders that lay beside the stream in one place would not, some night, at exactly twelve o'clock, get up and go down to the


brook and drink, as the walking stones used to do once in a hundred years, leaving all the treasures of gold and silver that were under them exposed to view, and free plunder for anybody who knew about it. What if they should ! and what if this centennial drinking should happen while he and Frank lived in there ! And what if there should be, among the birds in the trees, a Johnny Redbreast, that would come by and tell them where to find a little sea-cow that would give milk enough to make them rich, — only he did not think there would be much chance for selling milk there. He searched many times for the yellow groundsel, that would enable him to understand what the birds said : yet he found nothing but the yellow California poppy ; and, for some reason, that did not do at all.

Perhaps all this was not very profitable, but it made him happy. Indeed, there was a brightness, a kind of inexplicable glory, about those long, sunny days, that he looked back upon and remembered as long as he lived.



CHAPTER XIII.

THE SECRET.

UNE passed and July came, bringing with the warmth and midsummer days the end of the grain-harvest, and the withering of the foliage and the grass, till the bare hillsides already began to look brown and sere. But the stream in the cañon, though not full, was merry and musical still ; and so its banks and the rocky ascent on either hand were almost as green and beautiful as ever.

No fairy queen or prince in disguise had, as yet, found the way into the ravine, nor had Charlie, in any of his explorations, happened upon an enchanted place ; though

he used to think, sometimes, in the calm sunny mornings, that the whole glen was one: yet the boys were well and happy, and all things seemed to prosper with them. Charlie rambled and loitered and dreamed in the sunshine, following the bent of his own inclinations; and, though he never could quite understand what the larks and quails and red-headed woodpeckers said, — except that they kept telling how happy they were, — and did not make much progress in finding out the family secrets of the rabbits and gophers and ground-squirrels, yet that did not hinder his growing healthier and ruddier every day, and being most entirely satisfied and contented.

The blackberries up the brook hung in jet-black luscious ripeness; and Frank had returned from his trip to San Francisco,

bringing with him the big trunk that contained the bulk of their worldly possessions. He had enjoyed the going and returning in the great wagon, where he sat perched up on the high seat beside Mike O'Connor, and also the two-days' stay in the city, exceedingly : and yet he said he was "glad to get home ;" looking around the small domicile, as he said so, with quite an important air.

"I didn't see any such blackberries as these in the city, Charlie," said Frank, helping himself to another saucer-full of the fruit, which Charlie, with extraordinary forethought, had gathered to surprise Frank on this first night of his coming home.

Charlie did not reply : his heart was full of a far more important matter, with which

he was aching to astonish his brother, but which he had fully resolved to keep secret till supper was over and the work all done. Charlie had been Norah O'Connor's special charge during his brother's absence, doing his best to be pleasant company for her, and making blundering attempts to amuse the baby and be generally useful ; and she, appreciating his good intentions, if not their carrying-out, had made him a present with which he was delighted ; and it seemed to him that he could not possibly wait till supper was over before showing it to Frank.

But he did wait with wonderful self-control, listening while Frank told how Mrs. Betts had welcomed him, and how anxious she had been about them, and how she had held up both hands, and could not believe him when he told her how nicely and comfortably they were living.

“ And you ought to have seen her, Charlie, when I told her how many days I had worked, and how much I had earned, and showed her that I had more than half of my twenty dollars by me yet ! She was just as kind as she could be. She gave me that blanket there by the trunk ; and it is packed full of good things. We’ll remember her, Charlie, as long as we live, won’t we ? And I went with her to see the doctor ; and he was very kind too, and said in his queer way, ‘ Pretty well done ! I told thee this one had an old head.’ But then he asked me if I thought we could live here through the rains, and said we ought both to be in school, or learning a trade, unless I meant to be a farmer. And he offered to advertise for Uncle Frank in the San-Francisco papers, so that, if he

were living anywhere in California, or near it, he could not fail to know that we were in search of him. And when I asked him how much it would cost, he said it would not cost me any thing. Now, Charlie, if you'll help me a little, we'll make a platform for the trunk, so that it shall not stand on the ground ; and then we'll unpack it. I almost dread to open it, it makes me think so much of father."

"Come around behind the house first, Frank: I've got something to show you," said Charlie, nearly bursting with the effort it had cost him to keep still so long.

Frank followed him, wondering what it could be ; and there, in one corner of a crazy coop, which it had exhausted all Charlie's skill to put together, sat a plump white hen, brooding a dozen downy little

chicks in the most motherly way imaginable, and looking as contented as if she did not know that she could get out of her rickety prison at any time with one poke of her head.

“O Charlie! isn’t that worth having?” exclaimed Frank, with eyes fully as bright as his brother’s. “Where did you get her?”

“Mrs. O’Connor gave her to me, for doing so much work,” said Charlie, in a very self-complacent tone.

“Good for you, Charlie! Now, that’s just what I’ve been wanting ever since we’ve been here. You see, if all these little chicks live, by November they will be as big as the mother; and next spring they’ll lay eggs. Then we’ll have thirteen hens, and can eat eggs every day. Won’t that be splendid? I do hope they will live.”

“Oh, they’ve got to live! we’ll make ’em,” said Charlie decidedly.


And then Frank added, “And you made a coop and all! I didn’t think you could. But I guess I’d better make it a little tighter, for fear of the coyotes.”

He did not like to tell Charlie that his coop would not stop Mrs. Biddy whenever she chose to walk out. She did not choose at present, however, but sat still, like a sensible hen as she was, and submitted to be fastened and covered securely up for the night, where no thieving coyote could smell her out; and then the boys went back into the house, and began to unpack the trunk.



CHAPTER XIV.

HOW TO BE WISE.

HE next day was the Sabbath, and the brothers were sitting under a bay-tree, in a sheltered spot which Charlie had discovered, where not a breath of the afternoon wind could reach them. Frank had been reading aloud, from his father's large Bible, the story of Joseph,—that simple and beautiful story that is always new and always interesting, however familiar it may be.

“You see, Charlie,” said Frank, shutting up the book, and looking down musingly into the brook below them, “Joseph just

took right hold and did his very best, wherever God put him, — when he was a slave in Potiphar's house, and when he was in prison, just the same. And so, after a while, God made him governor of Egypt. Now, that is the way we must do

“But God didn't put us here,” said Charlie : “we came ourselves.”

“Yes, I know,” said Frank ; “but then,” he added reverently, “I think it was God's leading that brought us. It seemed to be the only way I could do, and keep my promise to father and mother. And I am sure God has prospered us ever since we've been here, and sent us friends too. Mr. Carter was kind to let us live in his house, and Mr. and Mrs. O'Connor have been very kind. And we must do the best we can, and all we can, till God opens some other

way for us, just as he has since we came here. I felt like trusting him for every thing, and doing exactly what he wished, the day before we came into this gulch; and I believe he has been with us ever since, watching over us, and showing us what to do, and making other people kind to us. And we must trust him always, and do all we can to please him. Don't you remember what is said in the Testament about being "faithful over a few things"? And I've been thinking of what the doctor said about our going to school. Now, Charlie, there is this we might do. There are all our schoolbooks and slates and copy-books in the trunk; and I'll contrive to make some sort of a table to keep them on this week; and if you will go over the lessons we used to have with father, in the

daytime while I am away at work, then you can help me about them after I get home at night. You know you always could learn easier than I. You can help me a great deal, and in that way we shall not forget what we have learned ; and it may be we can go on a little in advance. Why, I have heard of boys who learned Latin and Greek all by themselves, without any teacher. But whatever we undertake to do, we must do it regularly every day."

Now, that was just the trouble with Charlie. It was almost impossible for him to be regular about any thing. He, too, looked down into the brook without being able to make up his mind what to say ; but he was pleased with the idea of teaching his brother.

Exceedingly fond of books, and compre-

hending almost intuitively whatever he set himself to learn, Charlie yet lacked entirely the element of perseverance and steady application which entered so largely into his brother's character. What he felt like doing he accomplished with rare ability. What he became interested in he acquired almost without an effort. But it was seldom that any consideration of advantage or duty could win him from the dreamy, imaginative world in which he delighted to dwell, to the performance of any task for which he felt disinclined.

Frank knew all this ; and it was more for Charlie's sake than his own that he made this proposition.

“It doesn't matter so much for me,” he said to himself: “I shall never be much of a scholar, any way ; but Charlie will make a

great man one of these days, if he will only apply himself, and be thorough. May be he will, if he thinks he has to give me lessons every evening."

And so, with working for the present and planning for the future, and trying to be and to do exactly as might please the only Father that now remained to them, the days and even the weeks flew swiftly by, and the Sabbaths with their holy quiet returned, like a glorious succession of angels' visits; and, mingling with the bright sunshine that ever filled the valley, a sweeter and more ethereal radiance seemed as though heaven were mingling with earth, or the reflected beauty of that "city" whose streets are of gold and gates of pearl was beaming down through the darkness of the invisible to light up their pathway to the skies.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MUSTANG PONY AND HIS RIDER.

HALLO! You don't say that you two fellows have stuck by till this time? Who'd a thought it? Didn't have the least idea of findin' you here," was the salutation of the man with the black beard and gray flannel shirt, as he reined up the little rough-looking mustang pony before the cabin in the cañon, not many days after Frank's return from the city.

The boys remembered him gratefully, and were exceedingly glad to see him: but they wondered what he came for, if he didn't expect to find them there, as he said; for he

seemed to have no "traps" to look after, but spent the whole afternoon and evening with them, examining all their improvements and their treasures, meanwhile making his curious comments, and asking his queer questions.

"Never seen through them two windows afore," he said, pausing before one of them: "didn't rightly know whether they was glass or not."

He did not fail, however, to appreciate the supper, on which Frank had lavished all his culinary skill, to the latter's entire satisfaction.

"Ripe blackberries and bread! — that's good enough for the President himself!" he exclaimed.

"I made it," said Frank, with a little pardonable vanity. "Mrs. O'Connor showed

me how, and she gives me the yeast. She's very kind to us."

"She gave me an old hen and some chickens," said Charlie.

"Well, well ! she never gin me no yeast, and no old hen, nuther. But, if I can git two such prime housekeepers as you be, I asks no odds o' the woman. You bet, we'll have some times when I come here haulin' wood, in about a month or so ; that is, if a biled table-cloth every day don't make me sick," he added, taking hold of the corners of the two white towels with which Frank tried to make the old table look as neat as possible. "I'll find grub for all hands," he went on, getting up from the table, and sitting down in the middle of the children's clean bed ; "and you shall cook, and save the money you earn to buy a

farm. You'll make a tip-top farmer. But what's this? Bed made up like a woman's, and biled sheets, I du declare!"

But afterwards, when bedtime came, no persuasion could induce him to try the "biled sheets."

"Don't know whether I should come out alive," he said, shaking his head doubtfully: "haint done sich a thing never since I come from away down East, jist t'other side o' sunrise."

So Frank made for him a couch of bushes in the corner; and in the early morning he took an abrupt, uncereemonious leave, wheeling his awkward beast around, after he had started, to call out, "I say, little chap, can you milk?"

"Oh, yes!" said Frank: "I always used to milk at grandfather's. Why?"

“ Oh ! nothin’. I only wanted to see if there warn’t somethin’ you couldn’t do.”

The next day, however, there came a man from Mr. Carter’s corral, leading a cow up to the door of the cabin.

“ Mr. Carter says she’s very gentle,” said the man. “ You can keep her here till he comes over. Tie her out and feed her, days, and Mike O’Connor will fix a shed for you to put her in o’ nights. She’s a-dryin’ up some ; but she’ll give all the milk you’ll want.”

Frank was overjoyed ; and even Charlie thought he should never get tired of watching her and cutting grass for her.

“ And I can have all the bread and milk I want, if I do that,” was his conclusion.

“ Yes,” said Frank ; “ and I shall learn to make butter. And then, Charlie, the

sour milk will be so good for your chickens."

To do him justice, Charlie did not often tire of watching and feeding the cow, or of the care of his hen, though he found it hard to keep up any thing like regularity with the lessons. Without being very observant of their nature or habits, he had a fondness and fellow-feeling for all animals. The cow and the hen were better company for him, during the days when he was alone, than any playmates of his own age could have been. He held long conversations with them, never doubting but that they understood him; and, perhaps, in some sense, they did.

So the summer passed, and comforts and conveniences multiplied in their isolated life, Charlie said, "Just like a fairy


story." His cheeks had browned in the sun, and he was growing to be a stout, healthy boy ; while Frank's early rising and active industry only seemed to invigorate, and render more hardy a naturally robust constitution. Frank was beginning to question with himself whether he could not, in a year or two, manage to get a little land of his own, and whether a farmer's life were not, after all, the pleasantest in the world, and the one in which he could be most certain of making money enough to educate Charlie, and give him such advantages as he meant to do. He felt stronger and more resolute every day, as he looked into the future. He could see that their present position was just the best thing that could have happened to them in their loneliness and dependence after their father's

death and their disappointment in not finding their uncle. It seemed to him he could trace the finger of God running like a line of light through all their experience. He was sure that One wiser than they had watched over them and guided them, and arranged all things for their benefit; and he felt like trusting in him more firmly at all times and everywhere.



CHAPTER XVI.

THE STRANGE VISITOR.

T was getting near the time that they might expect Mr. Carter over to stop with them, while he worked at drawing wood, when, one evening, a stranger, well dressed and with a carpet-bag in his hand, stopped at the open door of the cabin, and asked leave to come in and rest. He was a very unusual apparition in that out-of-the-way place ; for he was young and handsome, and had the air and manners of a gentleman. Frank wondered, as he gave him the best seat by the fire, — for the evening was a little chilly, — who he could

be, and whether he had lost his way ; but he did not think it polite to ask questions : and soon the stranger took a newspaper from his pocket, and began to read.

So Frank went on preparing the supper and laying the table, though he was oddly conscious, every now and then, that the new-comer was watching him ; and, for some reason or other, he could not help, in turn, glancing often into the gentleman's face, with a strange feeling as if he were trying to remember something, or had somewhere seen that face before.

At length, however, his meal was ready, and the gentleman readily accepted his invitation to join them at table. Frank had made tea for their guest's especial benefit that night ; and he seemed rested and refreshed by it, for he soon began to talk : and

by the time their meal was finished and cleared away, the children had forgotten every thing but to be charmed with him. He drew from them their whole story, so naturally that they hardly knew it, and entered at once into all their plans. He even went out in the moonlight with Charlie to see the cow and the hen, and made himself so entirely at home, that Frank thought, "I wonder if he will stay all night if I ask him?"

He did ask him ; and the stranger laughingly replied, "Not if I should be turning you out of your bed. I don't see that you have but one."

"Oh ! I can make a bed of redwood boughs here in the corner," said Frank. "I know how. They make a very good bed, and Charlie and I have slept on them several times."

“Very well, then,” said the gentleman: “if you will make me such a bed, I will sleep on it to-night, and be very much obliged to you; but I could not think of taking yours from you.”

So Frank brought in the boughs, and made all ready; and then they sat down again before the fire, Frank glancing at the stranger and then at Charlie, with a queer notion in his head that there certainly was a strong resemblance between them. “I wonder if Charlie will look like him when he grows up,” he thought.

But the gentleman put these thoughts out of his head by asking, —

“Now, Frank, — I believe that is your name, — wouldn’t it have been better if you had staid in the city? It seems to me you have a hard life here. By your

own story you work early and late. I do not think you would have had to work so hard at any place they'd have got for you."

"It isn't hard work, sir ; and I like it. Besides, it wasn't the work I cared about, any way. I wanted Charlie with me ; and that I couldn't have in the city. Now I am earning enough to keep us both ; and Charlie is well and happy, and nobody can be unkind to him or abuse him. I never could have borne that, you see. The only thing that troubles me is, that Charlie ought to be in school. I don't think it matters so much about me ; but Charlie will make a splendid scholar, sir, if he has the right training."

Frank looked up just then to meet the eyes of the stranger fixed on his face, and full of tears. He was too much astonished to say any more ; and, after a little, the gentleman spoke : —

“Now, children, we have had a very pleasant evening together; and, before we go to sleep, I want to tell you my story. I had a sister once: she and I were about as near of an age as you two are; and I loved her, Frank, as well as you love Charlie, though I do not think I ever was so thoughtful and so self-sacrificing for her, — it wasn’t in my nature. Well, we grew up. She married, and I came out here to California. She wrote to me very often at first; but, after a while, her letters grew less frequent, and spoke of ill health. And then a few weeks passed, and I got a letter from her husband, telling me she was dead. I never had a brother, and she was my only sister; and for a time I felt as if I had lost every thing. She left two little boys, one of whom was named for me; and I said these

little boys should be very near to me, for their mother's sake. But I was in a whirl of business and excitement; and, somehow, I grew careless, and didn't write. I do not know how it was; I never meant to do it, I am sure: but years went by, and still I never wrote. I was in the country, very near this place, and then I went up to Virginia City and beyond; and almost everywhere I was successful, and made money.

One day I took up a San-Francisco paper, and happened to read an advertisement; and then I knew that my sister's children were in California, — their father dead, and they alone among strangers. I closed up every thing in a day, and came down to San Francisco. I found Dr. —, and — What is the matter, Frank? Look at me,

and see if I look like any one you ever saw before ? ”

“ Mother ! Uncle Frank ! ” exclaimed the boy. But it was too much for his manliness : he hid his face in his hands and sobbed, while the tears ran over the gentleman’s cheeks ; and Charlie, sitting on his redwood block, with very wide-open eyes, was just beginning to have a faint conception of what it all meant.


That night, before they retired, the three knelt down around the children’s bed, and, with overflowing hearts, lifted up their voices in gratitude and praise to Him who is the all and in all of the universe, and the guide of our life, — the man, that he had found the lost lambs in the wilderness, and now had a definite purpose in life before him ; and the children, that an eye that

never sleeps nor loses sight of the weakest of us for a moment, had watched over their footsteps, and guided them, without their knowledge, into "green pastures beside the still waters."



CHAPTER XVII.

NEW LEAF IN THEIR LIFE-BOOK.

 HERE was great excitement in the cañon the next morning, in the region of the redwood cabin. Norah O'Connor was flying backward and forward between the two dwellings, with her baby in her arms, doing what she might to expedite the departure of the boys; and, in the mean time, giving vent to the intense feelings that struggled in her heart for utterance, in those droll accents, and amusing words so peculiar to her people.

“Sure, an’ it’s a blissed thing, sir, that ye’ve come afther the poor childer. It’s a

hard life they've lid all alone by theysilves in the cabin, with no mither nor relation to look to thim an' do for thim. Sure, an' it's mesilf that's tried to spake pacebly to them onct in a while, an' been afther hilping thim not to sooffer till they's did entirely. Howly mither! how my heart ached for thim!" she said; and then the generous sympathy of her Irish nature bubbled over in tears, and, with many an "ahone!" and "God bless you!" she bid them farewell.

Mike was busy in getting up his team to carry the children's trunk by and by up to the stage-road; Frank was working with a will in packing up the things he had selected to carry with them, and in taking the remainder over to Mrs. O'Connor's as a present. Charlie led the cow up to

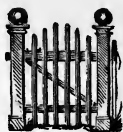
Mike's yard with a leave-taking that was sorrowful enough. Then he wandered through all his old haunts, up and down the brook, bidding good-by to the birds and squirrels, every one of whom seemed to understand that something was going on. Last of all he hugged his old hen heartily, and carried her, with all her chickens, to Norah; leaving many tearful injunctions to have them taken excellent care of, as he should certainly come after them as soon as he had another home.

The sun shone very brightly in the cañon that morning, lighting up with unwonted brilliancy its wooded sides; the brook sang as noisily as ever, as it dashed over the rocks and rushed along between its winding banks, in many a miniature cataract and whirlpool; yet its voice

seemed to have a deeper and more expressive tone than was its wont. The wind moved in subdued whispers among the leaves, as if conscious that something of great moment to at least two of its young playfellows was about to take place.

So, in the midst of the unspoken but expressive farewells of bird and stream, and breeze and tree, and all things they had loved so dearly, as companions and friends during their stay in the valley, and Norah O'Connor's tears and blessings, they locked up the little cabin, taking the key to give to Mr. Carter with their explanations and parting words, when they should pass his place in the other cañon; and then, slowly and sorrowfully following their uncle up out of the beautiful ravine, they turned over a fresh leaf in their life-

book, with grateful feeling to the infinite Father who had ordered all things so kindly for them, and with a firmer resolution ever after to “trust him more, and love him better.”







Strong, Mrs. M.D.

The orphan brothers

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